

# News Release

**For Immediate Release**

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## **SPELL SAYS 1997 GOOD YEAR FOR MS AGRICULTURE**

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Agriculture and Commerce Commissioner Lester Spell said today that 1997 will go down as a good year for agriculture in Mississippi. "Overall, the value of agricultural production was up 3% in 1997," said Spell, "with a total value estimated at just under \$5 billion."

Poultry remained the number one commodity in Mississippi in 1997, with its estimated value of \$1.4 billion up 6% from 1996. Forestry, the state's #2 industry (and the only industry with a major presence in every Mississippi county) was also up a healthy 3%. Other big gains were recorded by soybeans (+25%), catfish (+22%), rice (+25%) and hogs (+13%).

Of course, not every crop went up in 1997. Among Mississippi's top ten commodities, cotton (-3%), corn (-48%) and milk (-5%) came in lower this past year. But, said Commissioner Spell, there was at least one silver lining in the bad news. "In both cotton and corn, we had a record crop yield," said Spell. "But greatly reduced acreage contributed to their overall decline."

Commissioner Spell said that 1997 gains were particularly good, considering that 1996 was also a very good year for crops. However, Spell said, the best news is for the average Mississippian. "Agriculture is the #1 industry in Mississippi," said Spell. "When it does well, our economy does well too."

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